

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 002261

SIPDIS

SEOUL FOR AMBASSADOR HILL. DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/BCLTV. HQ
USPACOM FOR FPA (HUSO)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/30/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM TH](#) [BM](#) [BURMA](#) [ASEAN](#) [ARF](#) [NRC](#)

SUBJECT: THAILAND: AMBASSADOR HILL'S MEETING WITH
OPPOSITION MP SURIN PITSUWAN

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission, Alex A. Arvizu, Reason: 1.4 (d)

11. (C) Summary: A/S Designate for East Asia and Pacific and U.S. Ambassador to Korea Christopher Hill met with opposition Democrat Party (DP) Deputy Leader and former Foreign Minister Dr. Surin Pitsuwan on March 29. Surin urged the U.S. to continue to pressure Thailand and ASEAN partners to seek democratic reform in Burma by withholding the ASEAN chairmanship from the SPDC in 2006. He stated that the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) should become more than just a discussion group, and suggested appointment of an ARF "special envoy" for the Korean peninsula. Surin opined that the new National Reconciliation Commission (NRC), chaired by former Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun, might prove to be more than Prime Minister Thaksin bargained for. End Summary.

12. (U) U.S. Ambassador to Korea Christopher Hill, the A/S Designate for EAP, Ambassador Boyce and Poloffs from Embassy Seoul and Bangkok met with opposition DP Party Leader Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, a former foreign minister in the Chuan Leekpai administration. The veteran Muslim MP recalled how former Secretary of State Colin Powell, at the ARF meeting in Phnom Penh in June 2003, had set the right tone for U.S. relations in Southeast Asia with the statement that although the fight against terror must be made, the U.S. must uphold human rights at the same time. Surin said that he had recently spoken with some Thai economists who were surprised at the recent U.S. Human Rights Report chapter on Thailand. Surin's contacts were under the (obviously uninformed) impression that the US was only concerned about the war on terror and other security issues and no longer interested in human rights.

KEEP THE PRESSURE ON BURMA

13. (C) Surin stated that "Southeast Asia is coming back" in the area of human rights, citing recent democratic changes in Indonesia. He commented that the current Thai government has an "authoritarian bent" under Prime Minister Thaksin. He lamented being in the opposition and the magnitude of his party's defeat in the recent national elections, but said that the DP and other opposition parties will continue to debate the government, albeit with a weaker voice. He stressed that, because of the governing Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party's dominance in Parliament, U.S. dialogue with the RTG, especially via ASEAN, is vital. On Burma, Surin said he thought that U.S. approaches to ASEAN to "pressure" the SPDC to skip their slated 2006 chairmanship would meet with a favorable response at this time. He suggested that one compromise would be to allow the SPDC to host some ASEAN meetings, but not serve as chair. Surin thought that ASEAN was undertaking a "real evaluation" of the issue. The EU and Australia were "coming around" to this point of view and, with help from the US, Japan might as well. Ambassador Boyce mentioned his recent meeting with Japanese Deputy Foreign Minister Tanaka and Tanaka's recent meeting with Burmese Prime Minister Soe Win (Septel).

ARF ROLE IN KOREAN PENINSULA?

14. (C) Surin raised the issue of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and its need to play a more meaningful role in the region. He suggested that an ARF "special envoy" to the Korean peninsula be appointed, not as a mediator, but as a "messenger" -- one who could gather information and share it among the members of the six-party talks. Ambassador Hill said he would raise this idea in Washington once he takes up his new post.

SOUTHERN THAILAND

15. (U) On continuing violence in the three southernmost provinces of Thailand, Surin commented that the south has been a problem for many previous governments. The Thaksin government had seriously miscalculated by dismantling previous successful security structures shortly after it assumed power in 2001, Surin said. This led to a crisis in human rights violations and in the rule of law as the government tried to quell rising violence. Surin noted not only the thousands of suspected extrajudicial killings nationwide in 2003 during the government's anti-narcotics

campaign -- which he said some put as high as 3,000 -- but claimed that he has heard of thousands of disappeared or "kidnapped" Muslim "suspects" in the South. (Comment: These numbers, in both cases, strike us as exaggerated. End Comment.)

EDUCATION REFORM, THE NRC AND COUNTERING THAKSIN'S WEEKLY RADIO ADDRESS

16. (U) On other topics, Surin discussed the need for education reform in Muslim schools (pondoks or madrasas). In most areas of the far south, he said, the traditional Muslim curriculum was taught in the morning, while the "modern" curriculum was left for the afternoons, resulting in a "half-baked" education that left the youth entering the job market with few skills or educational achievements. The curricula in Thai, English, math, science and information technology must be strengthened. Surin commented that the composition of the newly formed National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) was good, balanced and hopeful. He wondered openly what the Commission will do with its 9-month mandate and expressed his hope that recommendations can be passed along quickly for action, and that meetings can be held as events take place. Surin was pleased that Anand Panyarachun, the highly respected former prime minister, was not afraid to openly criticize Thaksin, noting Anand's call for public release of the reports of the Independent Commissions investigating the incidents at the Krue Se mosque in April 2004 and at Tak Bai in October 2004. Surin noted that "Thaksin may come to regret appointing Anand." He also mentioned the worrisome trend toward concentration of corporate and RTG control of the broadcast media and said that DP opposition leader Abhisit Vejjajiva will propose an equal air time "right of reply" to counter PM Thaksin's influential weekly Saturday radio address.

17. (U) Ambassador Hill did not have the opportunity to clear on this message.

BOYCE